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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the three-stage theory of attitude development proposed by Goodman (1964), Dr. Phyllis A. Katz, director of the Institute for Research on Social Problems, suggests that eight overlapping but separable steps occur in the acquisition of racial beliefs. The major points in Katz's schema are: (1) early observation of racial cues; (2) formation of rudimentary concepts; (3) conceptual differentiation; (4) recognition of the irrevocability of cues; (5) consolidation of group concepts; (6) perceptual elaboration; (7) cognitive elaboration; and (8) attitude crystallization. References are included. (Author/JW)

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HOW CHILDREN DEVELOP RACIAL AWARENESS

ERIC/EECE Short Report-2

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

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How Children Develop Racial Awareness

ERIC/EECE Short Report - 2

IN CONTRAST to the three-stage theory of attitude development proposed by Goodman (1964), Dr. Phyllis A. Katz, director of the Institute for Research on Social Problems, suggests that eight overlapping but separable steps occur in the acquisition of racial beliefs.* Outlined in simplified form below is Katz's developmental schema.

1. **Early Observation of Racial Cues.** A child's first observations of racial groups different from his or her own may be based upon spontaneous environmental events. In addition to environmental influences, the child's developmental level may affect the exhibition of racial awareness. For a 1-year-old, racial cues may not be especially salient, although they may be noticed. While little is known about the specifics of racial awareness as it relates to overall development, most children do exhibit such awareness by the age of 3.

2. **Formation of Rudimentary Concepts.** Verbal expression of racial differences is generally present by the age of 4, and will likely elicit "labels" from surrounding adults, siblings, or playmates. At this point, direct evaluations from others may influence the child's concept of race (for example, a mother's warning to her child that he or she must not play with a racially different neighbor). In addition, indirect evaluations may come into the picture at this time, through generalization occurring from fear of the strange (Allport, 1954), from fear of the dark (Williams & Morland, 1976), or from previously established associations with the colors black and white (Williams, 1964; Stabler, Johnson, Berke, & Baker, 1969).

3. **Conceptual Differentiation.** Children who understand the group labels given to different races next receive constant verbal feedback, in the form of informational comments from others (for example, the remark "Yes, your friend is black even though she has light skin, because she has very curly hair"). Sometimes these comments may, like those involved in the acquisition of rudimentary concepts, be evaluative in nature ("Yes, that boy is white, and I would rather you didn't play with him"). Such feedback further emphasizes intergroup separation and teaches defining characteristics and associated feelings.

4. **Recognition of the Irrevocability of Cues.** Children often have difficulty understanding that, unlike their size, their sex is not subject to change--that is, that whereas one "grows up" to be an adult, one always remains either male or female. Gender constancy, or the understanding that one remains the sex one was born, is usually observed in children ages 5 to 6. Early cognitions about racial characteristics may provide similar difficulties for the child. Research is inconclusive, but Semaj (1980) has observed "racial constancy" in 7- and 8-year-old black children.

5. **Consolidation of Group Concepts.** Not until the child can correctly label group members and recognize the permanent nature of group membership does an accurate concept of racial membership exist. Consolidation results in the functional interrelationship between perceptual and cognitive components, what racial cues the child notices and what he or she thinks about them. At this time, beginning during the latter part of the preschool period and continuing over a considerable period, evaluative comments incorporated earlier become part of the child's concept.

6. **Perceptual Elaboration.** After the concepts of "us" and "them" are learned, subsequent perceptions of racial cues may be modified. Differences among groups may become more accentuated, and differences within groups, particularly other-race groups, may become diminished. Some research suggests this stage occurs first in preschoolers (Katz, 1973) and develops further throughout grade school (Katz, Johnson, & Parker, 1979; Katz, Sohn, & Zalk, 1975). In short, the mechanism of perceptual elaboration assists the learning of differential responses to out-group individuals.

*The full text of Dr. Katz's paper "Development of Children's Racial Awareness and Intergroup Attitudes" will be available on ERIC microfiche in February 1982. It will also be available in spring of 1982 in *Current Topics in Early Childhood Education, Vol. IV*, Lilian Katz (Ed.), Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, in press.

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7. Cognitive Elaboration. The process by which the "concept attitudes" or racial preferences of younger children become the more complex racial attitudes of older children or adults is what is meant by the term "cognitive elaboration." Although little is known about this period, it is clear that the child's school experiences are instrumental in the solidification of beliefs. Attitudes expressed by peers and adults may especially influence the child during this time of attitude transition--the grade school years.

8. Attitude Crystallization. This final stage probably occurs during the latter grade school years. After coming to terms with his or her racial attitudes, the child will probably not rethink them unless placed in a situation which requires it--unless, for example, his or her social environment undergoes marked change. To account for the apparent intransigence of adult racial attitudes, it seems necessary to postulate this last phase.

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